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THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY (Continued)

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 49
ACTS 13:13-17

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ACTS 13:13-17 "Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem. But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the Synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on. Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Isarel, and ye that fear God, give audience. The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it."

We have already studied how Barnabas and Paul and John Mark did mission work in the Island of Cyprus and had great success there. In Cyprus they found a people living under Roman law, rather well advanced and well educated people, living under the peace provided by the Roman government, and living in wealth and luxury. We are to see them move from Cyprus, the native land of Barnabas, and go over to the mainland to a very different kind of country. Tarsus, the birthplace of Paul was a part of this land, so they decided to go into South Galatia next.

ACTS 13:13 "Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem." It is good for us to have these details in our minds as they apply to the map of this area. This particular area is famous for pirates and wild mountain people. This is the time when John Mark decided that it was time for him to visit his mother in Jerusalem, so he deserted them and went back. As we say today, he got cold feet and turned back.

"Loosed from Paphos" is simply an idiom for unfurling their sails and going out to sea. Perga is a very ancient city in what is now called Turkey. This land had a famous pirate-ridden coast. For 400 years this had been a place of fear and dread. It was here in 140 B.C. that Hannibal had his last fight with the Roman Empire. Antiochus the Great had ordered Hannibal to handle his fleet and it was here that Hannibal was defeated. Pamphylia is the word in our lesson which caused John Mark to run away. Pamphylia is one of those places you dare not go without guards. It was inhabited with wild men. In his eleven years of conquest, Alexander the Great said these were the most dangerous pirates he ever faced. John Mark didn't have enough Bible Doctrine in his mind to sustain him, so he turned back toward home.

The word here is "departing" and that is too tame for a good translation. It is from two Greek words apo-choreo. Choreo means to desert, to run away from your task. Apo refers to the ultimate source of something. So the word simply means that from the ultimate source of his own fears, he deserted Barnabas and Paul. John Mark came from a wealthy family in Jerusalem. He was planning to be a Priest, but when he was converted he cut off the tip of one finger. He acquired the name of "The Cut Off One" and this meant he could never be a Priest. So at this point John Mark thought too much of his own safety and he became a deserter. He had mental attitude sins and he was afraid. This pressure situation brought out the fear that was in him. Fear is a terrible thing and for a time it ruined the life of John Mark. All the historians who have written of this Pamphylian area describe it as the wildest area in the earth. It was a land that was really never conquered. Now since they were so wild and lawless, why did Barnabas and Paul have to pick out an area like this? John Mark just couldn't make any sense out of a thing like this, and all these things led to his desertion.

Since Pamphylia was a deserted heathen area, let us look again at the principle of heathenism.

1. Based on the essence of God, it is impossible for God to be unfair to any member of the human race. God is righteous and just and he is fair to every human being.
2. Next we have the principle of unlimited atonement. On the Cross, Jesus bore every sin that had ever been committed or would ever be committed. Therefore the issue is not sin, but the issue is Christ.
3. Next we have the application of the sovereignty of God.
2 PETER 3:9 says--"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."
4. There are two points where every person has an opportunity to enter into relationship with God.
 - a. God consciousness. All people, no matter how primitive, become aware of the existence of God. If these people send up positive signals to God with positive volition, then God assumes the responsibility of giving the Gospel to them. If they go negative and refuse to believe, then God has no farther responsibility to them.
 - b. Gospel hearing. For all who desire relationship with God, God will provide information for them. Positive volition has moved about over the earth and where people become willing to believe, God gives the message to them. This was true in the 2nd and 3rd centuries in North Africa, and in the 4th century in Ireland, and in the 6th century in China. These people went on positive signals and millions of them were converted.

So first in the Island of Cyprus, and then in Pamphylia, God's Spirit moved in to convict these people of their sins. These places were just as different as places could be. Cyprus was far advanced, people well educated, people living in wealth and in peace. But over in Pamphylia there was little wealth and little education and culture and the people were as primitive as they could be. But God moved in both areas, though they were as different as two sections of the world could be.

John Mark just couldn't see the reason for going to such a backward area so he took off for home. Pamphylia is described in 2 Corinthians 11:26 with the words "Perils of robbers". The word here used of John Mark translated "returned" comes from the Greek hupo strepho and means that he turned away from this opportunity because of the human viewpoint of fear. Remember that later John Mark would rebound and would become one of the greatest Christians of the 1st century.

ACTS 13:14 "But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down." John Mark left them at Perga and Barnabas and Paul moved on through Pamphylia and went over the mountains and came to Antioch in Pisidia. Please remember, this is wild mountain country. This city had been built by Alexander the Great. Please notice that there is not one word about this wild journey through this dangerous area. The principle is this--when you are on God's mission, God is going to take care of you and whatever happens is his will. For all of you in this room now, this is the principle--you are a believer, you have been converted, and you are in his service. This being true, he is going to take care of you and is not going to let anything happen to you but that which is for the best of all. Nothing can harm you when you are in God's plan and purpose. God protects his own.

ACTS 13:15 "And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on."

This was the custom in the Jewish synagogue. They would read Scripture and make comment on it. They would explain what the Scripture meant. The "Law and the Prophets" is the name of the Old Testament Scriptures. It was the custom in those days, when the formal service was done, to ask the visitors if they had some message to bring. Since Paul and Barnabas were there, they were invited to speak. You see with no newspapers, no radio or television, they got very little outside news. So here was a chance to hear from the outside world and they were not going to miss an opportunity like that. So they said to Paul and Barnabas, "You now have the floor".

ACTS 13:16 "Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience." They could tell by their features that Paul and Barnabas were Jews. And when Paul began by "Beckoning with his hands", they knew he was a Jew. It was more than a gesture to get attention, it was a certain way they had of raising their hands toward Heaven that let everyone know they were believers. Then Paul said, "Men of Israel". This is the way a Jew would address his own people. "Ye that fear God" simply meant those who had a positive volition toward God. Antioch in Pisidia was a great trade center and Jews had flocked to this city. They had positive volition toward God and it gave Paul and Barnabas a great opportunity to do some effective witnessing.

ACTS 13:17 "The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it." Please notice that Paul began with a point of history with which they were all familiar. "The God of this people" is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. The creator is the Saviour. This is the way Stephen had started his great sermon, and it made such a deep impression on Paul that he decided to start his sermon in the same way. He is here using the historical method. He is going to begin with the Exodus, something they knew well. But what they didn't know was that Jesus Christ was the one who was behind all this and was the one who had made their nation possible.

He said, "Chose our Fathers". That goes right back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This verb "chose" is in the middle voice and means that God had a great plan in his mind when he chose them. This Jewish nation was the only nation ever founded on regeneration. All other nations were founded on natural generation. But the Jews were different. "Chose" is a way Paul had of reminding them that they were a part of the plan of God.

Paul's point was this--since God founded this nation on regeneration, it is his desire that every one of you will be regenerated.

The word "Exalted" has very great meaning for the Jews. This is what God did for his chosen people. They began with 75 people in Egypt and they were there in prosperity for 30 years, then for 400 years, they were there in slavery. But even under slavery that 75 people became 2 million adults when they finally departed from Egypt. Now slavery usually destroys a people, but not the Jews. Slavery just made them develop. God cared for them, taught them, gave them guidance and direction and they developed in spite of slavery.

Here is the principle--if you belong to God and if you trust him, he will see you through any sort of difficulty and defeat. God exalted them--and with a strong arm brought them out.

In our next study we will see how these people in Antioch in Pisidia responded to Paul's sermon.